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TESTIMONY

OF

BURTON S. LEVINSON

CHAIRMAN, LATIN AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE OF B'NAI B'RITH

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

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ON

ANTI-SEMITISM IN ARGENTINA

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 28, 1976

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, my name is Burton S. Levinson and I am the Chairman of the Latin American Affairs Committee of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. I am accompanied this afternoon by Rabbi Morton M. Rosenthal, the Director of the League's Latin American Affairs Department.

The Anti-Defamation League was founded in 1913 as an official arm of B'nai B'rith, a service organization of Jews created in 1843, to advance good will and mutual understanding among people of all creeds and races, and specifically to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish activities. Among its many activities directed to these ends, the ADL, through its Department of Latin American Affairs, has maintained for more than a decade a continuing relationship with Latin American Jewish communities and with other organizations, Jewish and non-Jewish, which are interested in that region. As chairman of the ADL Latin American Affairs Committee I have visited Argentina and other Latin American countries on various occasions.

We appreciate, Mr. Chairman, your invitation to appear before this body, together with representatives of the Catholic community, to present our views on the human rights situation in Argentina, with particular reference to anti-Semitic activity. Our testimony is based upon the independent findings of the league, which routinely monitors anti-Semitic activity throughout the world. It is also based upon press and government report reaching this country. Accepting without verifying on the ground the authenticity of the information, we nonetheless regard it as part of our responsibility to speak, even if unasked by Jews in Argentina, on the plight of Jews in that country.

Through historic experience, the world has learned that Jewish people often serve as a moral barometer, the status of Jews reflecting the moral climate of the society in which they live. This is due to the fact that Jews are often the initial target chosen by destructive forces which ultimately endanger nations and world peace. We, therefore, understand the interest and concern of this committee, stimulated by the proliferation of Nazi literature and record levels of anti-Semitism during this period of great social and political turmoil in Argentina.

The number of Jews in Argentina has for long been estimated to be 500,000, but a recent demographic study indicates that the figure may be closer to 400,000. In either case, it is the largest Jewish community in Latin America and one of the largest centers of Jewish population in the world. Argentine Jews enjoy full and equal rights of citizenship and have made significant contributions to their country's development, in all spheres of activity.

The amount of anti-Semitic activity to which the community is exposed fluctuates, with peak periods often coinciding with unstable political conditions. Thus, in 1966, subsequent to the military coup led by Gen. Juan Carlos Onganía, there was a sudden surge in anti-Semitism which produced feelings of uneasiness in the Jewish community. This was widely reported in the world press and was the subject of a study by the Anti-Defamation League.

A marked increase in anti-Semitic activity began about 18 months ago and it has remained at an unusually high level since. A report on anti-Semitism, published in Argentina in May, 1975, said that the escalation of such activity in the preceding two-month period had "exceeded all that previously known." In recent months, it escalated again, as the cities were flooded with Nazi literature as the number of bombings and shootings directed against Jews grew more menacing.

Mr. Chairman, I offer at this time several documents which contain information on anti-Semitism in Argentina. One is a compilation of incidents during an eighteen-month period, from May, 1975, through September, 1976. The other two are articles by Rabbi Rosenthal, which were published in June, 1975, and August, 1976. These documents do not represent an exhaustive treatment of the subject, but they should serve to portray the nature of the problem.

They document an organized campaign, designed to discredit and intimidate the Jews of Argentina. A primary objective of the campaign is to persuade the Argentine public, and officials in key sectors, such as the military forces, and

labor unions, that Jews are a threat to the economic, social and political life of the country. To achieve this objective, a massive propaganda effort has been launched, utilizing all arms of the media.

To illustrate, the Argentine public is being told that there is an international Jewish plot to create a second Jewish state in Patagonia, the southern section of the country. A spurious tract entitled "The Andinia Plan" (El Plan Andinia), by Walter Beverrage Allende, a professor at the University of Buenos Aires, has been given wide circulation as a pamphlet and in book form, bound together with the infamous "Protocols of the Elders of Zion." The Andinia plot has also been "exposed" in magazines such as Restauracion, which deal heavily in anti-Semitism. It was widely circulated in provincial newspapers by means of a wire service story, carried by the Spanish news service EFE which reported the existence of documents allegedly proving the existence of this "plot."

The anti-Jewish campaign has gone beyond the denunciation of Jews to encourage physical attacks upon them. The editors of El Caudillo, a well-known hate magazine which ceased publication in March, 1975, used its final edition to announce that its supporters would no longer devote their energies to denouncing Jews in print. Telling its readers that the time for action is at hand, the magazine printed an inflammatory poem that is a direct call for pogrom. A few verses will suffice to demonstrate that point: "Nine at night is a good hour for this....The place you already know: the Quarter of Usury. Wave a thousand truncheons, bloody a thousand heads...that all will be devastated."

Last month, the Jewish Quarter, "Barrio Once," was attacked. Unidentified thugs drove through predominantly-Jewish neighborhoods and strafed Jewish-owned shops with machine guns and placed bombs in synagogues and Jewish schools and cultural institutions. A group calling itself the Argentine National Socialist Front claimed responsibility for some of the attacks and declared, "Thus commences the war which will only end when the Jewish-Bolshevik plutocracy is exterminated."

During this period, we have also witnessed the disturbing proliferation of Nazi literature, translated and published in Argentina.

The bombings and machine gun attacks have apparently been intended to intimidate the Jewish community and serve as a warning; although there has been considerable damage, there have been no injuries. Jews have, however, been among the victims of terrorism which has claimed more than nine hundred lives this year and are also among the many Argentine citizens who have "disappeared." In some instances there were indications that anti-Semitism was a factor in their murder or abduction.

Protests against the increasing violence have been voiced in numerous quarters. The two most prestigious newspapers in Buenos Aires, La Prensa and La Nacion, have editorially condemned the "Nazi activity in the country." La Prensa called upon the government to denounce and foil the plot by those whose attacks on Jews, reminiscent of the "Brown Shirts" of the Third Reich, bring discredit to the government abroad. La Nacion called for "severe measures" to prevent the attacks and eliminate the books which serve as an apologia for the crime.

The English language Buenos Aires Herald, in an editorial titled "Shades of the Nazis?" warned that anti-Semitism in Argentina "should arouse widespread concern. It is a threat to our way of life." The paper called upon the government "to defend its credentials as a moderate government, opposed to all kinds of violence and any form of racial or religious discrimination, by dealing strictly with lurid Fascist literature as it does with extreme left-wing propaganda. A stroll along Avenida Corrientes to sample the offerings of the newsstands should be quite sufficient to demonstrate that there is indeed, something behind the latest wave of attacks on the Jewish community in Argentina."

Argentina's leading Catholic publication also asked the government to ban the Nazi books. "Criterio," a Catholic monthly, pointed out that the Nazi books

attack both Jews and the Vatican. Representatives of the Argentine Jewish community have repeatedly denounced the anti-Semitic campaign. Spokesmen for DAIA, the Delegation of Argentine Jewish Associations, which is the representative body of Argentine Jewry, have met with the Minister of Interior and the Chief of the Federal Police to express "the visible uneasiness generated within the Jewish Community because of the recent anti-Semitic attacks,..." In a telegram to the police chief, DAIA requested that the authorities take effective measures to put an end to the racist violence.

The Anti-Defamation League had a cordial and constructive meeting on September 7, with the Argentine ambassador to the United States to express concern about the proliferation of Nazi literature and the high level of anti-Semitism. We asked that the Argentine government condemn anti-Semitism and prevent the distribution of such literature. The following week a decree was issued, closing Editorial Milicia, the principal source of Nazi books, and specifically banning six titles. The decree stated that the measure was invoked because the books generate reactions against certain sectors of the population and their ideology is not compatible with the essential values of the Argentine nation.

We view the action of the Argentine government as a significant first step in dealing with the problem of anti-Semitism. However, we are troubled by the partial nature of the decree, banning only six titles, but permitting the continuing circulation of others, published by the same firm and containing the same message of hatred for Jews. In view of the total ban on left-wing groups whose ideology is not compatible with the nation's goals, we would hope that the authorities will take equally effective measures to halt the campaign against Argentine Jewry waged by extremists of the right. We look forward to vigorous Argentine government action to put an end to this wave of anti-Jewish bigotry.

Our organization is acutely aware, given the history of the Jewish people, that there is a vital linkage between the rights of Jews and the rights of others. Throughout the sixty-three years of its history, the League has operated on the

premise that if the rights of any one are to be secure, the rights of all must be made secure. We are concerned for all, regardless of religion or nationality, when they are victims of kidnappings, terror and murder.

Mr. Chairman, we also wish to state that we recognize the problems the government of Argentina is confronting in its attempts to restore tranquility to a nation sorely beset by political strife and economic woes. We hope that Argentina will soon return to a tranquil state, in which the rights of all are respected, but we believe that this is possible only if the government follows an even-handed policy in dealing with all terrorists and those who incite group hatred.